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Meese to Retain NSC Membership

Post Is His Despite New Job

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Attorney General Edwin Meese III said yesterday that the president wants him to remain on the National Security Council because the attorney general is involved in issues such as terrorism, intelligence and covert activity relating to international drug trafficking.

"It's something the president and I discussed," Meese said at luncheon for reporters and editors at The Washington Post. "It wasn't a matter of asking. It was a matter of discussing what my role would be at the time I became attorney general."

Meese served on the National Security Council during the past four years while he was counselor to the president, but his predecessor as attorney general, William French Smith, was not a member of the NSC.

Membership on the council became a point of contention recently when the new U.N. ambassador, Vernon A. Walters, complained that he had not been allowed on the council despite an earlier commitment from Secretary of State George P. Shultz. Administration officials said Walters' predecessor at the United Nations, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, also had not been a member. But they said that she had been invited to many meetings and that Walters would be too.

During the meeting, Meese also said:

■ The exclusionary rule, which prohibits the use of illegally gathered evidence in criminal trials, has made it "harder to go against narcotics peddlers," although it is impossible to say how many

narcotics cases have to be thrown out of court because of the rule.

Meese has said he supports legislation that would allow juries to consider evidence illegally obtained when police had a "good faith" belief that they were obtaining it legally.

■ Law enforcement authorities have been seizing more narcotics than previously, indicating significant progress in combating drug traffic. Meese acknowledged that it was difficult to know exactly how much progress had been made because "we have no data base to start with" to know the volume of narcotics that has come into the country in a single year.

■ He would like to meet with as many representatives of minority groups as possible to discuss civil rights issues. He said he wanted to meet with "not just the self-appointed leaders and the leaders of the traditional groups like the NAACP" to discuss civil rights issues.

In response to a question about the value of the Ethics in Government Act, Meese said, "As far as the independent counsel law, I'm hardly in a position to complain." An independent counsel concluded last year that no evidence existed of criminal wrongdoing by Meese.

But Meese said some of the standards "border on the ridiculous," particularly the regulation prohibiting officials from accepting gifts from foreign governments worth more than \$140 when "you get some ceremonial gift from another government and that government values it as under \$100 and you get over here and the government here says it's worth \$300." Meese, while on a trip to South Korea, received a pair of gold-and-jade cuff links that was valued differently in that country than in the United States. The independent counsel investigated and found that Meese's failure to surrender the cuff links was based on a "good faith belief that the value of the cuff links was within acceptable limits."

Meese said when persons enter government service, "more time should be spent acquainting them with what they have to go through" in understanding government ethical regulations.

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